Brett Heinz

Since the release of his first studio album, "B.o.B. Presents: The Adventures of Bobby Ray," Atlanta-based rapper B.o.B. has been very busy. Opening for Eminem and Jay-Z in Detroit, receiving multiple award nominations from MTV, BET, and Nickelodeon, taking place in a line of Adidas advertisements, and engaging in a small feud with fellow rapper Tyler, the Creator have kept the emcee, real name Bobby Ray Simmons Jr., active up to the release of his second album, "Strange Clouds," debuting in 7th place on Billboard's Hot 100. The sophomore album, released May 1st, sounds very similar to B.o.B.'s other works, maintaining a hip-hop sound with heavy pop influences.  
 Standout songs such as "Bombs Away," "Out of My Mind," "Arena," and "So Good," highlight B.o.B.'s witty lyricism and conscience material, strengthening the comparisons with fellow Atlanta-rapper Andre 3000. With the exception of these and several other tracks, however, the album tends to fall flat in the area of originality, falling back on very cliche pop-originated production and choruses. Songs such as "Never Let You Go" and "Just a Sign" run together with a similar sound of top-40-oriented rap love songs.  
 The lighter, less-lyrically focused songs are sure to receive plenty of radio play, but not necessarily much critical praise. This is quite opposite Bobby Ray's earlier work, including the releases "Cloud 9" and "12th Dimension," which, although not commercially successful, contained much more of the wit true hip-hop fans look for. It is common for artists to adapt a more mainstream styling as they increase in popularity, sometimes to the point of losing their musical identity, so the fact that he has displays a considerable amount of the rapping skills he acquired early in his career is a sign he is still true to his art form.  
 Much can be said about the album's style by observing the guest artists B.o.B. decided to include in his work. Guest verses from artists like Lil Wayne and T.I. suit the album's southern hip-hop sound while features from Nicki Minaj, Taylor Swift, and Chris Brown complement the more radio-friendly pop sound. The former, although taking a slightly smaller role on the album than the latter, makes the release worth a listen.  
 In the end, people's opinion of the album will undoubtedly fall on the expectations they have going into it, leaving the album up for grabs as far as judgment goes. As long as listeners don't enter expecting B.o.B's *magnum opus*, they will most likely be in for a pleasant experience.